



EMPOWERING INDIA: EMPOWERING WOMEN

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Abstract: In the 21st century, women's empowerment has become a significant concern in India. However, the reality of women's empowerment still needs to be discovered. We witness daily how women are mistreated due to various social evils. Women empowerment is crucial to enhance women's capabilities, allowing them access to resources and make important life decisions. It encompasses uplifting women's economic, social, and political status, particularly those traditionally disadvantaged. This paper is based on secondary sources, including articles published in various journals, leading newspapers, and websites. The findings indicate that, despite numerous efforts by the government, women in India still occupy a slightly lower status than men. Additionally, the acceptance of unequal gender norms among women persists in society. The study concludes that access to education, employment opportunities, and changes in the social structure are key empowering factors for women's empowerment. These elements are vital in challenging gender disparities and empowering women to achieve equality and agency.

Index Terms - Women Empowerment, Education, Employment, Social Structure.

I. INTRODUCTION

“women’s empowerment” is a relatively new concept in gender literature. It can be divided into two broad categories: general and specific. Generally, it refers to empowering women to be self-reliant by giving them access to freedom and opportunities that they were denied in the past simply because they were female. More specifically, women's empowerment refers to strengthening their position in the social power structure. In other words, empowering women means creating an environment where they can make independent decisions for their own growth and the development of society. It is a way of shielding them from all forms of violence. Specifically, women's empowerment involves creating an environment where women can make independent decisions that promote their personal growth and contribute to the advancement of society as a whole. It is a process through which women gain greater control and participate more actively in decision-making, ultimately striving for equality with men in various domains such as economics, social affairs, politics, and civil society.

II. PRESENT STATUS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

Over the years, significant changes have occurred for women in India since the 1950s. While issues like dowry, rape, sexual harassment, molestation, and eve-teasing persist even after seventy-six years of independence, it remains a shameful aspect of our nation. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the situation has improved compared to earlier times. Indian women have gradually begun to recognize their true potential, questioning societal norms imposed upon them. As a result, they have started breaking barriers and earning a respectable position worldwide. Today, Indian women have excelled in various fields, from social work to space exploration, leaving no domain unconquered. Women in India have showcased their power and prowess in politics, sports, entertainment, literature, technology, and beyond. In literature, notable figures like Jhumpa

Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and Shobhaa De have made significant contributions. In cinema, women such as Shabana Azmi, Rekha, Vidya Balan, Smita Patil, and Konkona Sen have defied traditional gender roles, breaking free from the constraints of a male-dominated industry. In politics, women from Indira Gandhi to Shiela Dixit, Sonia Gandhi, Vasundhara Raje, Jayalalithaa, and Mamata Banerjee are making their presence felt across the country. In the sports field, PV Sindhu, Sania Mirza, Mary Kom, Sania Nehwal, and Sakshi Malik represent a remarkable chapter in the ongoing journey toward gender equality.

Today's modern woman is incredibly skilled and independent, often deserving the title of "superwoman." Women are now fiercely ambitious, showcasing their capabilities not only on the domestic front but also in their respective professions. They actively participate in various aspects of life, including education, engineering, medicine, politics, teaching, and sports. The progress and success of a nation can be measured by how it treats its women. There is a growing awareness regarding women's rights, moving away from objectifying them and instead recognizing their worth. However, despite this progress, women are still expected to fulfil traditional roles as wives and mothers, often prioritizing family over personal aspirations.

III. Issues and Challenges Faced by Women

The main issues that were faced by women in past days and still today are as follows:

1. **Violence against Women:** Indian women often live in fear and distress due to various forms of violence, including rape, molestation, dowry harassment, domestic violence, abduction, and forced prostitution. These heinous crimes continue to afflict women and tarnish the fabric of society.
2. **Gender Discrimination:** Gender discrimination remains prevalent in India, where one gender is given preferential treatment over the other. Female feticide and gender-based discrimination are deeply rooted problems that need urgent attention.
3. **Neglect and Poor Health:** Indian women endure widespread exploitation socially, psychologically, politically, and economically. They face numerous health challenges, including anemia, malnutrition, and a higher mortality risk due to inadequate healthcare and neglect.
4. **Unequal Sex Ratio:** India's declining female population and imbalanced sex ratio are alarming trends. The government must address this issue promptly and implement measures to tackle gender-based discrimination.
5. **Lack of Education:** Women have historically been denied equal access to education, with a prevalent belief that girls are a burden on their families. Although significant progress has been made in female literacy rates, there are still barriers and challenges.
6. **Dowry Menace:** Dowry, where the bride's family is expected to provide gifts or money at the time of marriage, continues to plague Indian society. Dowry-related conflicts and exploitation persist, causing immense suffering for women and their families.
7. **Sexual Harassment:** Instances of sexual harassment, including high-profile cases like the Delhi gang rape, expose the vulnerability of women in society. Child abuse, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and child labor are grave issues that demand immediate attention.
8. **Workplace Challenges:** Women face various challenges in the workplace, including sexual harassment, unequal treatment, and discrimination. Unequal shifts, excessive demands from superiors, and an exploitative environment hinder women's progress and professional growth.
9. **Family and Social Issues:** Women shoulder disproportionate responsibilities within families and society. Their contributions are often undervalued and frequently relegated to secondary roles. Women's involvement in spiritual and social activities is limited, perpetuating gender disparities.

IV. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT SCHEMES

The Government of India has introduced several impactful schemes to uplift and empower women nationwide. These initiatives cover many areas: education, health, safety, skill development, and financial security. Here are some notable schemes:

1. **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao:** Launched in January 2015, this scheme focuses on addressing the declining Child Sex Ratio and promoting the protection and education of the girl child. It raises awareness, celebrates the birth of girls, and provides support in 100 identified districts with low sex ratios.
2. **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana:** Aimed at securing the future of girls, this scheme encourages parents or guardians to open savings accounts for their daughters, contributing to their education and wedding expenses. The deposited amount can be deducted under Section 80C of Income Tax.

3. **Ujjawala:** This comprehensive scheme aims to prevent trafficking and rescue and rehabilitate victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. It focuses on awareness programs, mobilizing communities, rescue operations, rehabilitation services, repatriation support, and reintegrating victims into society.
4. **SWADHAR Greh:** Providing transitional shelter to women in difficult circumstances, this scheme offers support services, including shelter, food, clothing, healthcare, and vocational training. It benefits women without social and economic support, such as those facing domestic violence, homelessness, or exploitation.
5. **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP):** This scheme equips women with skills for employment and entrepreneurship, facilitating their economic independence. It provides grants to institutions and organizations for imparting various skills related to sectors like agriculture, food processing, tailoring, IT services, and more.
6. **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG):** This scheme focuses on the overall development of teenage girls, addressing nutrition, education, healthcare, and various social issues. It aims to enhance their well-being and empower them to overcome challenges.
7. **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA):** This initiative provides quality antenatal care to pregnant women, focusing on reaching women in rural and remote areas. It aims to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates by ensuring timely medical check-ups, diagnostics, and counseling services.
8. **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM):** This program empowers women in rural areas by promoting self-help groups (SHGs) and providing them access to financial services, training, and livelihood opportunities. It aims to enhance women's decision-making abilities and economic self-reliance.
9. **Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK):** Under this scheme, women-centric services such as skill development, employment generation, digital literacy, health awareness, and legal aid are provided through a network of one-stop centers at the district level. It aims to empower women through various support services and capacity-building initiatives.
10. **Skill India Mission:** This initiative aims to provide women with skill development and vocational training opportunities, enabling them to acquire employable skills and become self-reliant. It offers skill training programs tailored to the specific needs of women, fostering their economic empowerment and entrepreneurship.

V. WAYS TO EMPOWER WOMEN

Empowering women involves providing them with the tools, resources, opportunities, and support needed to participate fully and equally in all aspects of life. Here are various ways to empower women:

1. **Education:** Promote access to quality education for girls and women. This includes ensuring equal opportunities for enrollment, reducing dropout rates, and addressing barriers like poverty, cultural norms, and gender biases.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Create opportunities for women to participate in the workforce, entrepreneurship, and income-generating activities. This can be achieved through skill development programs, access to credit and finance, vocational training, and the promotion of women's economic rights.
3. **Gender Equality and Ending Discrimination:** Advocate for equal rights and opportunities for women, challenging discriminatory practices, laws, and norms. Promote gender-sensitive policies, legislation, and awareness campaigns to eliminate gender-based discrimination.
4. **Health and Well-being:** Improve access to quality healthcare services, reproductive health, and family planning resources. Address issues like maternal mortality, child marriage, and gender-based violence, and promote women's well-being and mental health.
5. **Political Participation:** Encourage women's involvement and leadership in decision-making, politics, and governance. Support initiatives that increase women's representation in elected bodies, policymaking, and community leadership roles.
6. **Legal Reforms and Protection:** Advocate for legal reforms that protect women's rights, ensure access to justice and address issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based crimes. Strengthen law enforcement mechanisms and provide support services for survivors.

7. **Technology and Digital Inclusion:** Bridge the gender digital divide by promoting access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) for women. Enhance digital literacy and skills to enable women to benefit from technology advancements, online platforms, and entrepreneurship opportunities.
8. **Mentoring and Support Networks:** Establish mentoring programs and networks that provide guidance, support, and role models for women and girls. Encourage peer support and create safe spaces for sharing experiences, knowledge, and resources.
9. **Education on Gender Equality:** Integrate gender equality education into school curricula and community programs. Raise awareness about women's rights, gender stereotypes, and the importance of equal opportunities for all.
10. **Media Representation:** Promote positive and diverse portrayals of women in media and entertainment. Encourage media platforms to highlight women's achievements, stories, and contributions, challenging gender stereotypes and promoting inclusivity.
11. **Cultural and Social Transformation:** Challenge deep-rooted gender norms, attitudes, and stereotypes through community engagement, awareness campaigns, and cultural initiatives. Promote gender-equitable practices within families, communities, workplaces, and institutions.

VI. CONCLUSION

We have a roadmap for women's empowerment but still have a long way to go. We hope that women's empowerment proves its worth in the future. Women are essential to any society and significantly impact the nation's future. Government initiatives would not be enough to achieve this goal. The community needs to take action to create an environment where there is no discrimination based on gender, and women have complete freedom to make their own decisions and contribute to the socio-economic and political life of the nation with wisdom and equality. As Swami Vivekanand once said, "The best thermometer for the development of a nation is the way women are treated." Therefore, due recognition of women in society and their increased participation in socio-economic and political matters is more important than ever. Every individual should come forward to ensure the equal status of women in all areas of life.

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